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ABSTRACT

Contemporary homelessness is the result of increasing social and economic inequality faced by those in American society who are most vulnerable to individual, family, and economic instability. This case study of the homeless population of Los Angeles (California), based on two surveys conducted in 1984, views the homeless as a segment of the social stratification system of the United States. The history of homelessness since the Civil War is reviewed, and the following developments are analyzed for their contribution to the rise of contemporary homelessness: (1) the low-income housing crisis; (2) deindustrialization; (3) recession and unemployment; (4) increases in the poverty rate; (5) cutbacks in social welfare programs; (6) increasing family instability and domestic violence; (7) deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill; and (8) the policies of the Reagan Administration. Public and private sector responses, including those of the Reagan Administration, to the needs of the homeless are reviewed, and attempts by the homeless to organize politically are discussed. Major legal strategies to aid the homeless in Los Angeles are reviewed and evaluated. Political solutions to the plight of the homeless are recommended. Statistical data are included on 21 tables and two figures. A list of 267 references and an index are appended. (FMW)

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